

WHAT POLITICAL SCIENTISTS MAY (OR MAY NOT) KNOW ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS

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The 2008 presidential nomination contests were the most expensive in history; excited millions more citizens to vote, and produced the first elongated nomination contest since the 1980s. Conventional wisdom was overturned, and many predictions (e.g., the front-loaded calendar would produce an apparent nominee by February) proved wrong. Does this mean that the existing political science literature is irrelevant? The answer is no. Some models may need tweaking, but the basic components identified by political scientists remained factors in the 2008 contests. This chapter highlights the existing literature and some apparent modifications for the 2008 contests.

PRIMARIES AREN'T DIVISIVE

One of the criticisms of primaries as they were being introduced at the beginning of the 20th century was that they would produce such fierce intraparty battles that the party would be unable to reunite to win the general election. This only seemed to be confirmed by the fiasco of the 1912 Republican presidential nomination, when Theodore Roosevelt bolted from the party after winning 10 of the 12 presidential primaries but losing the nomination at the convention to President William Taft.

Some early political science research supported the notion that primaries were divisive, both at the presidential level and for other offices. These initial analyses compared the divisiveness of the primaries, often measured as a dichotomous classification based on an arbitrary cut-off in

the margin of primary victory, with vote totals in the fall election. In research on direct primaries, Hacker (1965) and Pierson and Smith (1975) supported the null effect hypothesis, while Bernstein (1977) found evidence of divisive primaries. The next set of studies (Born 1981; Kenney and Rice 1984) began to include measures of the strength of the Democratic and Republican nominees during the primary (i.e., their overall vote percentage) in comparison with the general election vote. Kenney and Rice (1984) found divisiveness measured in this manner did affect the outcome of primaries for governors and senators, while Born (1981) found no effect for House elections. The third generation of research began to control for weakness among the candidates that would have led to competition in the first place. Thus, Westlye (1991) controlled for the weakness of Senate incumbents and found the effect of divisive primaries to be spurious. Likewise, Kenney (1988) found controlling for candidate quality negated the influence of divisive primaries.

Lengle (1980) and Lengle, Owen, and Sonner (1995) translated the aggregate-level methodology to the presidential primaries. Using a 20 percentage-point margin as the definition of divisive primaries, they compared the fall presidential election vote for the parties between states classified as having divisive or not divisive presidential primaries. Kenney and Rice (1987) improved on this model by developing a measure of comparative divisiveness across the two parties' primaries in a single election and adding some controls for the expected partisan vote in a state, but still found primary divisiveness to harm general election vote totals. Atkeson (1998) faulted prior works for failing to control for other indicators of candidate weakness. She modeled the effect of primary divisiveness (measured in terms of relative primary strength of Democratic versus Republican nominee), unemployment rates, and prior presidents' evaluations on the vote for the incumbent president's party in the fall election. When used alone, the relative measure of primary divisiveness is strongly related to the party's fortunes in the fall election, but when the two controls are added, the divisiveness variable becomes insignificant.

Divisive primaries also are investigated from the individual voter perspective to see if those who supported a losing candidate in the primaries are less likely to support the party's nominee in the fall election.

Kenney and Rice (1988) examining the 1980 contests did indeed find that those who supported George H. W. Bush and Edward Kennedy were less supportive of their party's general election candidate (i.e., Reagan and Carter), but in contrast to a depiction of a more divisive primary battle on the Democratic side, the effects were greater on the Republican side. This was because the losing candidate among the Republicans was the more moderate candidate, so that Bush supporters would be more likely to defect to the Democratic candidate than the more liberal supporters of Kennedy would be to defect to Reagan. The relative ideological position of the winning and losing primary candidate may have an effect on the relative harm done to the party's fall prospects.

A number of other researchers have investigated the vote choices of disgruntled primary voters in the fall election. Using the 1980 American National Election Studies (ANES) panel surveys, Stone (1986) also reports an effect for primary divisiveness, but it is an indirect effect through the comparative ratings of the two general election candidates. Southwell (1986), reviewing the 1968 to 1984 presidential elections, found supporters of candidates losing the nominations to be less likely to support the party's nominee in the fall. Most of these analyses are based on a recall of primary vote preference in the ANES surveys, and Atkeson (1999) finds a significant level of misreporting in these data.

Another option for supporters of losing candidates from the primary phase would be to abstain from voting in the fall election. Southwell (1986) finds mixed results. In some election cycles, supporters of losing primary candidates were less likely to vote than other partisans (Kennedy voters in 1968, Muskie and Humphrey voters in 1972, and Brown voters in 1980). In other years, supporters of losing primary candidates were no less likely to vote in the general election (McCarthy and Rockefeller voters in 1968, Wallace voters in 1972, Brown voters in 1976, Kennedy voters in 1980, and Jackson voters in 1984). Finally, in a peculiar pattern (at least from the divisive primary argument), in some elections supporters of losing candidates were more likely to vote than supporters of the winning candidate (Reagan voters in 1976, Hart voters in 1984). Southwell mentions third-party candidates as offering a choice for disgruntled primary voters that kept them in the fall electorate. Yet the falloff in participation from the primaries to the general

election is minimal. Primary voters are a subset of general election voters, and voters with a strong habit of voting (Norrander 1986a). In addition, the presidential election is not the only contest on the ballot, and those with enough interest to vote in presidential primaries would most likely have interest in participating in choices for governors, senators, or other offices.

Divisive primaries also could harm a party's fall election chances by affecting the role of activists. Those who supported losing candidates in the primaries may be less likely to participate in campaign activities in support of the party's nominee. Stone (1986), in examining activists from Iowa in 1980, found no carryover effect for these activists' presidential vote but did find it affected their overall involvement in the presidential campaign. In a subsequent study of caucus attendees from 1984 and 1988, Stone, Atkeson, and Rapoport (1992) found a greater mobilizing than demobilizing effect for the participation of disgruntled activists in the fall campaign. Activists do not appear to be overly dissuaded from participating in the fall campaign if their primary election candidate loses, and a primary race that is mobilizing large groups of new voters, even if some are disappointed in the outcome, should have a larger base of activists for the fall campaign.

By the close of the 2008 Democratic National Convention, the divisiveness of the primaries was waning. Forceful statements by both Senator Hillary Clinton and former President Bill Clinton at the convention presented a united Democratic front for the Obama-Biden ticket. Former Clinton supporters continued to move their support to Obama. In the Gallup Poll daily tracker, 81 percent of former Clinton supporters endorsed Obama at the beginning of September, up from 70 percent immediately before the convention (Newport 2008).

GROUP VOTING IN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES: YES, THERE WAS A GENDER GAP BEFORE 2008

Much of the research on voting patterns in the presidential primaries downplays the role of issues. Policy differences between candidates from the same party often are minimal. Partisan voters may care more about a candidate they believe they could trust to make good decisions as a

president or one who could win the fall election. Thus, candidate qualities often appear to have strong links with voters' choices, though it is sometimes difficult to tell if this is a true causal relationship. Voters may only be mimicking the campaign themes that they have learned from candidates when they answer survey questions about candidate qualities (Norrander 1986b).

A number of groups have had distinctive patterns of support for presidential primary candidates. African Americans have had distinctive voting patterns in a number of the Democratic primaries (Hutchings and Stephens 2008). Of course this was expected in 1984 and 1988 when Jesse Jackson was a candidate, and he won 76 percent of the black vote versus 5 percent of the white vote in 1984, and 91 percent of the black vote versus 11 percent of the white vote in 1988. Al Sharpton in 2004 benefited from 14 percent of the black vote versus 1 percent of the white vote, though Kerry received a majority (56 percent) of the black and white (53 percent) vote. Yet African Americans also favored Carter in 1976 (44 percent of black voters versus 33 percent of white), Clinton in 1992 (71 percent of black voters versus 46 percent of white), and Gore in 2000 (84 percent of black voters versus 68 percent of white). No racial voting gaps appeared in the 1980 contest between Carter and Kennedy.

A gender gap appeared sporadically in the presidential primaries in earlier election years (McMullen and Norrander 2000; Norrander 2003). First, a difference exists in the ideological orientation of women and men participating in the primaries. In Democratic primaries, about three-fourths of the time no ideological difference occurs between women and men, but when a gap arises, women are more likely to outnumber men among the liberal category. The gender gap in ideology is actually more pronounced on the Republican side. About two-thirds of the time, women in the Republican primaries view themselves as moderates more often than do men, who are more likely to view themselves as conservatives. Women and men also look for different qualities in potential party nominees. Women look for experience, candidates who care, and candidates who can handle a crisis. Men are more apt to support maverick candidates who can shake things up or, on the other hand, look for candidates who can win the general election.

When examining candidate preferences, gender differences in the past also occurred more frequently on the Republican side, with a gender

gap occurring about one-third of the time. Women in 1988 were more likely to support Dole or Robertson over Bush; in 1992 they were more likely to support Bush over Buchanan; in 1996 women supported Dole over most of his competitors; and in 2000 women preferred Bush to McCain. In the Republican Party, women support religious candidates (e.g., Robertson) and avoid protest (e.g., Buchanan) or maverick (e.g., McCain) candidates. On the Democratic side, a gender gap in candidate preferences occurred about one-fourth of the time. In 1980, women supported Kennedy over Carter; in 1984 and 1988 the larger number of African American women voters created a gender gap in favor of Jackson; also in 1984 Glenn and McGovern did poorly among women voters, with Dukakis the beneficiary; and in 1992 Tsongas and Clinton gained more support from women, while Brown did better among men. In 2000, a gender gap occurred in half of the Democratic primaries, with women supporting Gore by 9.6 percentage points more than men.

In 2008, a gender gap occurred in almost all of the presidential primaries. Despite media reports that Clinton lost the female vote in Iowa, a gender gap did occur in those caucuses, with women voters being more likely than men voters to support Hillary Clinton. Figure 5.1 shows the gender gap for Senator Clinton in each of the presidential primaries. On average, Clinton received 8.6 percent more votes from women than men, while Obama received 6.9 percent more votes from men than women. Edwards did better among men by 3.4 percent. Clinton had a gender gap among white voters (11.6 percent), Latinos (9.7 percent), and African Americans (4.2 percent).

The gender gap for Clinton is a reflection of women wanting to vote for a woman for president, but the campaign themes and images of Clinton versus Obama also fit with prior patterns of gender gaps in desired candidate qualities. Women voters look for candidates with experience and are more reluctant than men to vote for maverick candidates. The Republican Party in 2008 also had some pattern of gender voting. Huckabee on average did better among women by 3.0 percent, reflecting the preference of religiously oriented women within the Republican Party. In contrast, Ron Paul did better among men by 2.7 percentage points. No consistent gender gaps occurred for McCain and Romney; in fact, in some states one candidate would receive more sup-

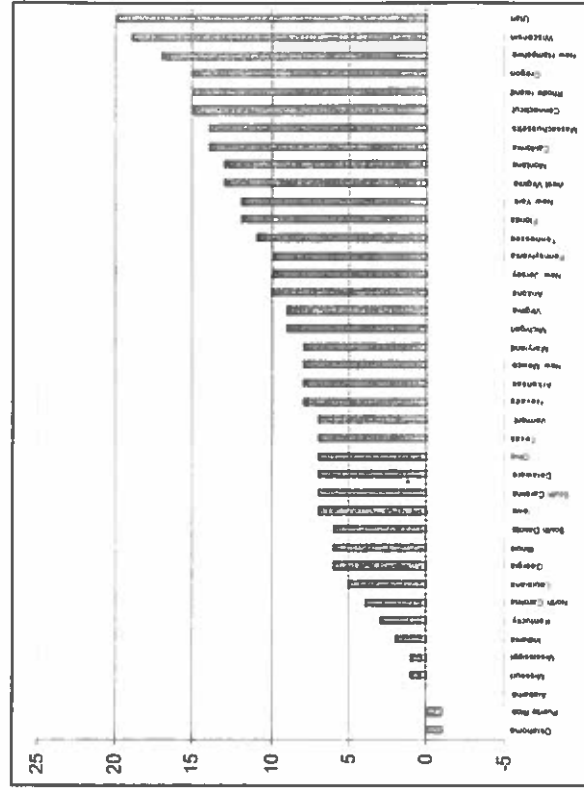


Figure 5.1. Gender Gap in Clinton's Vote by State.

port from women, but in other states the opposite candidate would have the edge among women voters.

A gender gap also occurred in the 2008 presidential primaries. Women were more likely to vote in the Democratic primaries, while men were more likely to vote in the Republican primaries. As table 5.1 shows, the gender gap in the 2008 Democratic primaries was

Table 5.1. Gender Gap in Turnout in Democratic and Republican Primaries, 2000 and 2008

	Democratic Primaries		Republican Primaries	
2008	Men	42%	Men	53%
	Women	58%	Women	47%
	Gap	15% Women	Gap	7% Men
2000	Men	43%	Men	52%
	Women	57%	Women	48%
	Gap	14% Women	Gap	4% Men

Source: 2000 and 2008 exit polls as posted on the CNN website.

15 percent, but this number was essentially the same as in 2000 when women were 14 percent more likely than men to vote in the Democratic primaries. The gender gap in the Republican primaries in 2008 was 3 percentage points larger than in 2000, with men being more likely than women to vote in the Republican primaries in both years. Most likely this gender gap in turnout in primaries reflects the gender gap in partisanship.

Overall turnout in the Democratic primaries increased by 7.7 million voters between 2000 and 2008, based on states with competitive primaries in both years (e.g., a 2000 primary before March 9 when Bradley conceded to Gore), for a 116 percent increase in turnout.¹ Turnout in the Republican primaries rose by only 147,259 votes for the competitive primaries (in 2000 before March 9 when McCain withdrew and in 2008 before February 7 when Romney withdrew). The highly competitive 2008 Democratic primaries mobilized a large number of voters. Data posted by Thomas Holbrook on his website suggest that the increase in participation rates was greatest among the young, second greatest for women, and then followed by an increase among African Americans.² Political science research on turnout in presidential primaries has always demonstrated that a more interesting race (more spending, more competitive contest, more media coverage) draws in more voters (Geer 1989; Moran and Fenster 1982; Norrander 1986a; Norrander and Smith 1985). The 2008 Democratic primary provided the American public with such a contest, and the public responded by flocking to the polls.

CAN WE PREDICT THE WINNERS OF PRIMARIES AND THE CLOSE OF THE NOMINATION CONTEST?

A core group of scholars have been forecasting the outcome of the presidential nominations for the 1980 to 2004 cycles (Adkins and Dowdle 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2004; Mayer 1996, 2004; Steger 2000; Steger, Dowdle, and Adkins 2004). Their models rely on funds raised during the invisible primary stage, cash on hand as of December, and standings in the last Gallup poll before the Iowa caucuses. Some additional fine tuning exists along the lines of adding in results from Iowa and New Hampshire and measures for specific types of candidates. While it may seem that these models are less able to explain the 2008 Democratic

contest than the Republican contest, the opposite is true. The forecasting models may not have predicted accurately whether Clinton or Obama would win, but they did accurately select these two as the leading candidates and also suggested that the contest would be close. Both candidates raised similar amounts in 2007 (Clinton raised \$116 million and had \$38 million cash on hand; Obama raised \$102 million and had \$18.6 million cash on hand). In the Gallup poll for December 14–16, 2007, Clinton led with 45 percent of the support to 27 percent for Obama. Clinton and Obama split the Iowa and New Hampshire contests. Thus, two well-financed, competitive candidates produced a long battle for the Democratic nomination. The length of the campaign was longer, but the factors that produced it (money, poll standings, split primary outcomes) were the same.

John McCain's rise to the Republican nomination was more unusual, given past forecasting models. McCain raised \$41 million during 2007, lagging behind Romney's \$88 million and Giuliani's \$61 million. The work of Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller (2008), however, would suggest that Romney's totals needed to be discounted for his own personal contributions. They argue that it is elite endorsements that lead to effective fundraising that can be translated into primary votes. Under this argument, Romney's 2007 funds raised (from others) totaled \$52 million in December, only \$11 million more than McCain's. The December 14–16, 2007, Gallup poll had Giuliani in the lead at 27 percent, with Huckabee, McCain, and Romney in a three-way tie for second (Huckabee at 16 percent, McCain at 14 percent, and Romney at 14 percent). The forecasting models always place more weight on the New Hampshire than Iowa outcomes, so McCain's victory there helped him more than Romney's win in Iowa.

The other core explanations for the presidential nomination victories are the attrition models (Hanson 2000; Haynes, Gurian, Crespin, and Zorn 2004; Norrander 2006) and end-game predictors (Norrander 2000a). The Republican contest certainly followed this attrition model, winnowing down to John McCain by February 7, when Romney conceded. Yet not to be overlooked is that the Democratic contest also was effectively winnowed early, before becoming a competitive two-candidate contest. Table 5.2 reviews the exit dates of the various candidates. Biden and Dodd dropped out after doing poorly in Iowa, and Richardson left after his poor showing in New Hampshire. The first Republican causal-

Table 5.2. Attrition of Candidates during the 2008 Nomination Contests

Date	Democratic Candidates	Republican Candidates
January 4	Biden, Dodd	
January 10	Richardson	Hunter
January 18		Thompson
January 22	Edwards	Giuliani
January 30		Romney
February 7		Huckabee
March 4	Clinton	
June 7		Paul
June 12		

ities were Hunter, who was ignored throughout the contest, and Fred Thompson, who did poorly in the first primary in his home region of the South (i.e., South Carolina). Kucinich, who did not leave the 2004 contest until the summer, in 2008 left at the end of January because he faced a tough reelection challenge for his House seat. Edwards dropped out after continuing to finish third, while Giuliani, who had staked his candidacy on Florida, withdrew after failing to win there. Romney dropped out after Super Tuesday. Huckabee and Paul remained in the Republican contest until McCain had secured the official 50 percent of the delegates needed for the nomination. Even Huckabee engaged in speculation that remaining in the contest might hurt his standings in the party, and Paul fits the mode of an advocacy candidate, who stays in the race longer in order to continue publicizing issue positions.

The end game for the presidential nominations occurs when the last credible alternative to the eventual nominee leaves the contest (Norander 2000a). The official number for winning the nominations is one-half of all delegates. But through candidate attrition, the nomination is often secured before this point. In recent nominations, a margin in delegate strength between the first- and second-place candidates that exceeds 25 percent of the delegates needed for nomination was often enough to convince the last office-seeking candidate to withdraw. Table 5.3 shows how these indicators performed in recent contests.³ In the nine contests with office-seeking candidates (excluding Republicans in 1992 and Democrats in 1996), seven came to a conclusion when the last major opposition candidate exited the race within two or three days of this criterion being met. The two exceptions are the Democrats in 1992, when Tsongas actually left the race too early, and the Democrats

Table 5.3. The End Game in Recent Presidential Nominations

Contest	Last Office-Seeker Candidate Exit	Advocacy Candidate Exit	Leader Has 50%	Delegate Margin > 25%
Dem. 1980	Kennedy		June 7	May 10
Rep. 1980	None		June 7	April 5
Dem. 1984	Bush	Jackson	June 9	April 21 Hart
Dem. 1988	Hart	None	June 7	March 24 Jackson
Rep. 1988	None	Jackson	June 7	April 21 Gore
Dem. 1992	Gore	None	April 28	May 5 Jackson
Rep. 1992	April 21	Robertson	June 4	March 14 Dole and Robertson
Rep. 1996	Dole	May 16	June 4	March 25 Tsongas
Dem. 2000	March 29	Brown	May 8	March 12 Brown
Rep. 2000	Tsongas	None	March 20	March 13
Rep. 2000	March 19	Buchanan	March 14	March 7
Rep. 2000	Forbes	None	March 14	March 7
Dem. 2004	March 14	Buchanan	March 14	March 7
Rep. 2008	Bradley	None	March 11	March 2
Rep. 2008	March 9	Keyes	June 3	Never, needed 530
Rep. 2008	McCain	July	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	March 9	Kucinich	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	Edwards	July 22	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	March 3	None	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	Clinton	Huckabee	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	June 7	March 4	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	Romney	Paul	March 4	February 5
Rep. 2008	February 7	June 12	March 4	February 5

Source: Norander (2000a) and updated by author using CNN delegate counts.

in 2008, where the 25 percent delegate margin was never reached. Neither Obama nor Clinton secured a substantial lead in the delegate totals. Thus, the Democratic contest continued through all of the primary states. On the last primary day, Obama's total of 2,156 exceeded the 2,118 needed, and Clinton withdrew four days later. In contrast, the 2008 Republican contest, for all practical purposes, was over on Super Tuesday, February 5, when McCain's delegate count stood at 680 versus 270 for Romney for a margin of 34 percent of the 1,191 needed for the nomination. Romney withdrew two days later. Both the short contest on the Republican side in 2008 and the long contest among the

Democrats came to an end when the delegate totals mirrored those of the end game in previous nomination cycles.

CONCLUSION

Political scientists have been studying the postreform presidential nomination system for 32 years and have much to say about the regularities of these contests. The 2008 presidential nominations would, at first glance, appear to be unique battles. On the Democratic side, a long battle ensued between an African American candidate and a female candidate. The contest between these two candidates is far removed from the early 20th century “availability criteria” of white, male Protestants as “ideal” presidential candidates. On the Republican side in 2008, the winner was a candidate with a reputation as a party maverick. Yet, on many fronts, the 2008 contests confirm what political scientists knew from prior research. The 2008 Democratic primary may have been long and produced disorientation among the supporters of Senator Clinton at the close of the primary season in June. But by September, the party was not as divided, with 80 percent of Clinton supporters indicating they would vote for Obama. Turnout rose in the 2008 primaries, but for the reasons laid out in previous research: an exciting, competitive contest increases turnout in primaries. Finally, the two contests in 2008 ended as expected. When McCain drew ahead of Romney with a significant delegate lead on Super Tuesday, Romney withdrew. As neither Obama nor Clinton amassed a significant lead in the delegate count, the contests continued through the last round of primaries in early June. Prior political science literature explains much about the regularities in the campaign that led to the unique 2008 outcomes.

NOTES

This chapter was originally prepared for the conference “Choosing the President in 2008: The Evolving Process and Its Effects,” held at the University of California, Berkeley, April 10–12, 2008.

1. The 2008 turnout figures are from the official state websites. The 2000 turnout figures are from Mayer (2001).
2. Thomas Holbrook, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, “A Changing Electorate?” <http://election08data.blogspot.com> (February 21, 2008).
3. Delegate totals for 2000 through 2008 are those reported by CNN on its website. These counts include superdelegates who announced their preferences and estimates of delegates from caucus states.